

УДК 81'373

Metaphoric Power of Phonosemantically Charged Lexis

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Received 18.09.2015, received in revised form 06.10.2015, accepted 11.11.2015

The article considers the ability of phonosemantic lexis (sound imitative and sound symbolic words) to semantic development, that can basically be explained by high metaphoric potential of natural sounds as well as speech sounds. There is no random element in the sound structure of phonosemantically charged lexis, it is based on conventional expectative phonetic organization possessing a predicative meaning, that provides high potential for metaphorization. Semantic evolution of phonosemantic lexis results into formation of new easily decoded nominations, which occupy periphery of target concepts.

Keywords: sound imitative lexis, onomatopoeia, sound symbolism, phonosemantic analysis, phonosteme, phonotype, phonosemantic reflection, metaphorization.

DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-2015-8-12-2812-2820.

Research area: philology.

Introduction

In any language sound imitative and sound symbolic lexis as a rule is represented by polysemantic words. The acquisition of new meanings occurs particularly as the result of metaphoric and metonymic transfers as well as other phenomena supporting semantic derivation of lexis (i.e. generalization, catachresis, enantiosemy and etc.). Such transfers of meaning applied to phonosemantically charged lexis (particularly to onomatopoeia) can be considered from two sides. Thus, after I.R. Galperin, sound symbolism by itself is a special case of metonymy since “such sound combinations refer directly to the object in the

receptor’s consciousness emitting that sound” [Galperin, 1981: 124], i.e. metonymic transfer is performed on the basis of relation between the object and the sound. Such “transferred meanings” for the modern language seem to be direct ones (like, bell – колокол), as language fixes not the nomination of a sound but the name of the object producing that sound within its phonetic structure. In this context, the idea of so called “imitative” gets to be more interesting. In that sense, G. Kornilov claims that “imitative” means not “the sound or phonation imitation, but objects, phenomena, processes, states and quality imitation with the help of sounds” [Kornilov, 1984].

As it is rightly stated by George P. Lakoff and M. Johnson, metaphors being used in everyday speech are based on associations between two phenomena or spheres of experience. The corresponding signifier in this case is transferred, using these associations, from one sphere called “source concept” into “target concept” sphere in such a way that the target concept is taken and described in the language of the source concept [Lakoff, Johnson, 1980]. Therefore, the metaphor performs in a manner to describe the phenomenon on the basis of conventional analogy, which, in the case of that mechanism failure, is unlikely to be fully accepted or analysed.

Metaphoric power of natural sounds

The mechanism of metaphoric transfer also draws attention within the concern of semantic change in the sphere of concepts of natural (“pure”) sounds. Thus, if we consider sound signals such as a horn sound, a bell sound or a whistle sound, it becomes clear why they all have special conventional meaning: 1) a horn sound means “to run quickly for a cover” or “the end of a working day”; a bell sound – “death” or “wedding”; a whistle sound – “train departure”, “foul”, etc. These very sounds being applied to other conceptual spheres will definitely call for conventionally associated meanings of the related source concept – that will make them possible or impossible to be used in other contexts. Thus, if we hear a horn sound or a whistle sound during a funeral speech, we conventionally will know that this very sound is not true to the situation and can at least be perceived as a cynical joke. However, in case when such sounds accompany a sound track, we will probably interpret some episodes of a film

not only within its visual content, but also with these sounds bearing in mind additional metaphoric and associative meanings. For example, let us imagine a scene depicting a loving couple on a narrow path of a park. Suddenly at that moment we hear a sound resembling a bicycle ring. The meaning of this sound is quite obvious – “give a way!” or “step aside!” – which coincides with the context. In the same situation a bell sound (that is also a natural, but a different sound) would lead the loving couple to think that there is a church somewhere near, and the bell sound call their attention – that may symbolize both burial service or wedding ceremony, as well as a danger or a warning. That proves the statement of a natural sound being a polysemantic one – the precise meaning of this sound is identified within its context, but in any way, it is quite clear, that a pure sound by itself is able to semantic metaphoric development.

Metaphoric power of speech sounds

In similar way, speech sounds have conventionally perceived metaphoric meanings. Sometimes these meanings are tough to be separated from iconic meaning of the sound itself. Thus, explosive consonants both iconically and metaphorically express the idea of energy, abruptness, dynamics and high feelings [Michalev, 1995]. A. Bernabe also declares the frequency of particular phonemes in Indo-European languages in certain lexical groups, such as terms of relationship, food, parts of the body, physiologic functions. In all these examples he marks the structure of the phoneme complex as “explodent +vowel”. According to the researcher such realization of explodents in these conceptual spheres refers to the “emotional function of the language”. The sound combinations that

rise the idea of phonation, form, movements, size with the help of their phonetic structure, he associates with so called “impressive language function” [Bernabe, 1988]. In that sense sound reduplications (especially combinations of voiced stop consonants and sonorants) used for the language realization of speech impediments – stammer, mewling or spluttering – are of a particular interest. Phonosemantic analysis of reduplicated nominations, s.a. *stammering*, *chattering*, *sluttering*, *gargling*, *cackling*, etc. verifies the fact that a speech sound reduplication is metaphorically used for a proper description, nomination and, consequently, perception of concerning events.

A. Bernabe in the same work introduces the idea of an “evocative syllabic structure”. Apparently that idea is based on the conception of “phonosteme”, put into the practice by J. R. Firth and understood as “an initial, central or end consonant combination or a combination of consonants with certain vowels functioning as a conventional indicator of the word meaning” [Firth, 1951: 184]. After J. R. Firth the term “phonosteme” was used by F. W. Householder to denote the “phoneme or a phoneme complex which is general for the group of words and containing a common element of the meaning or function” [Householder, 1946: 83-84]. In Russian linguistics V.V. Levitskii was the pioneer in studies on semantic and phonetic correlations of anlauts. According to the results of his research, “in the English language almost each of two- three phonemic combinations in the beginning of the root correlates with the particular meaning or the range of meanings” [Levitskii, 1983: 14]. Further on, this statement was developed in a conceptual way by S.V. Voronin who had built up a typology and classification of phonotypes – a reasonably precise term

introduced by S.V. Voronin to specify phonemic combinations grouped according to the types of their meanings [Voronin, 1982]. It is extremely hard to present within one article the whole list of phonotypes and their potential meanings. Still, the examples might be the following: the auslaut sound combination in the word *squash* has the affricate with the idea of destruction under the pressure (we can identify the same phonotype in the phonosemantic group of words such as *crush*, *mash*, *smash*, etc.). It becomes evident that this phonemic combination operates as the language means for the process of conceptualization of the involved event.

Considering the phonosteme /skw-/ in anlaut sound combinations in *squint*, *squeeze*, *sqelch*, *squirm*, *squiggle*, *squash*, etc., the most apparent interpretation of the phonotype meaning in these words is the idea of “reduction” (mostly this initial combination is followed by a high vowel representing the concept of some small things). Thus, any neologism possessing the initial phonosteme /skw-/ is perceived as having the idea of “compression” or “reduction”.

The research conducted by American linguist M. Magnus includes the experiment on identification and creation of neologisms. At the first stage, by giving to respondents definitions of non-existent words and asking them to create new words, this experiment evolves a predictive ability of phonotypes. For example, for the definition “*to scrape the black stuff off overdone toast*” 27% of respondents created words with *sk* – in the initial position. The second part of the experiment was dedicated to the reflection of phonotypes’ meanings in perception of nonsense words – the respondents were given an artificially- built word to be defined. The result of the experiment proved the

decidability of correlation between the phonotype and its meaning. Thus, for example, the word *glon* (with its initial phonosteme *gl-*) corresponds with the definitions including the idea of “light” (25%). M. Magnus suggests that apparently the language users perceive separate phonemes or phoneme combinations as the components containing the meaning [Magnus, 2000].

The abovementioned implies the fact that there is no random element in the sound structure of phonosemantically charged lexis. Vice versa, it is based on conventional expectative phonetic organization possessing a predicative meaning, that is, in fact, the framework for the metaphorization of the meaning.

Different phonosemantic expectations are evoked by different phonosemantic means. As for consonants, alliteration tends to be one of the most popular device both in the modern and archaic variants of the English language, and thus it forms one of the main “phonosemantic expectations” in nameplates and advertisement [Bregazzi, 2003]. The reason for the device to become so frequent in that type of texts is explained by mnemonic capabilities of alliteration and its efficient metaphoric mode of information transfer. Both natural sounds and speech sounds are able to metaphorize, so that it contributes to the development of a lexico-semantic variant with a predicted meaning. This meaning, as a rule, isomorphically posts the correlation with the form of the word and stays as the nominative meaning of phonosemantically charged words.

Theoretical framework

According to cognitive linguistics language is concerned as a cognitive system together with memory, perception and

thinking aimed at describing the processes of knowledge acquisition and transfer [Lakoff, 1980]. It is already a common knowledge, that a person in his life deals not with the world itself, but with its representations in one’s consciousness. Language (after L. Weisgerber and W. von Humboldt) is an intermediate world characterized by specific approaches towards the reality and the only world available for our experience.

The reflection of the reality in our linguistic consciousness, “quantization” of ideas and things by the means of language takes place at the level of concepts. Following the ideas of cognitive linguistics, we understand the concept as an ideal substance, mental structure, representing an integrated and systematic knowledge of a person about a particular element of the reality. Concept is a unit of the human conceptual system and the whole world view, reflected in the human mentality. The content of any concept includes the information on objects and their features; on things the person knows, expectations, thoughts or imagination about the world. Concept also contains value orientation both for an individual and for the whole language community. That is why the content of one and the same concept varies not only from one language community to the other, but from one person to the other as well taken within one culture and period of time. The main role played by a concept in human thinking ability is categorization, which allows to group object into more general classes on the basis of particular ideas about the world [Kubriakova, 1994]. Cognition is not a mirror which can objectively reflect features of an object, but only presents its mental interpretation. By learning the world, humans make their own order, and since so, within the process of categorization the main

role is given to the subject who possesses specific physical emotional organization, as well as social and cultural experience. The problem of the world order conceptualization made by human mind, the reflection of mental representations in the language and creation of the linguistic view of the world has recently been connected with the problem of metaphor, that being “the main method of the ordinary consciousness” performs as a prism in the light which the world vision is made [Sukalenko, 1991]. A remarkable turn in understanding metaphor belongs to the interactionist conception by A. Richards. According to his adapts, this conception not only allows to use the idea of interconnection of two objects within their metaphorization, but also exposes their cognitive reflection, evoking those associative and imaginative presentations which are also included in the new concept [Telia, 1997]. According to A. Richards, two different thoughts about two different objects are involved in metaphor – these thoughts interact with each other inside one word the meaning of which is the result of that cooperation. To describe metaphor mechanism A. Richards has introduced two terms: the idea about the object under the formation is called the “tenor”, while its linguistic realization with the precise meaning is “vehicle” [Richards, 1946].

M. Black declared two different referents in the process of metaphorization – the entity, which is nominated within the process performs as a *primary subject*, the other one is a *subsidiary subject*, correlating with the denotatum of the primary subject. Within the idea of metaphoric transfer M. Black uses the notion “filtration” – common associated points of a subsidiary subject go through the “filter” of the associated points of a primary subject. As the result, our understanding

of both referents is changed: a brand new information is produced and a “new cognitive or imaginative additional value” appears [Black, 1962]. Semantic studies of metaphors were continued by E. Kittay, who suggests, that an interaction of conceptions belonging to different semantic fields occurs in the process of metaphorization. The metaphor itself is, in fact, the behaviour of lexical units between these semantic fields [Kittay, 1987].

The cognitive theory of metaphor proves and completes rather than contradicts the semantic theory. The followers of the semantic approach consider metaphor as a mechanism of secondary subjects formation in the linguistic view of the world structure, while cognitologists analyse in-depth conceptual processes of its creation, i.e. they study metaphors as the phenomenon within the conceptual view of the world. From the cognitive point of view metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon, reflecting the process of acquisition of experience resulted from accompanying associations, and a new concept consequently becomes a product of this process. They also claim that the search for a model or an analogy focused on the transfer of experience from one content sphere into the other is the basic cognitive process, metaphor being a linguistic reflection of analogy processes. Cognitologists suggest that by learning linguistic metaphors we can understand how the perceived reality is being ordered in our conceptual system [Lakoff, Johnson, 1999].

Metaphoric opportunities of soundimitative and soundsymbolic words

The phonosemantic system of the English language (i.e. soundimitative and

soundsymbolic words) presents a wide range of components for the secondary nominations. Within this process the interaction of two concepts belonging to different conceptual spheres leads to the shift of a word from one conceptual field to the other.

Thus, the analysis of the concept “food” highlights a good number of names, built by the metaphorization of the lexis of phonosemantic origin. The phonosemantic approach gives the ground to assume the existence of particular correlations between the type of onomatopoeic and soundsymbolic words and the type of knowledge, expressed by this word within the secondary naming:

1. Classes “instants” (describe an instant strike) and “continuous instants” denote as a rule stale hard food emitting the same sound in food intake (clinker – a biscuit; cracker – a biscuit);
2. Tone continuous sounds (banger – sausage) present a sound typical for the process of cooking (from the explosive noises made by frying sausage).
3. Pure noise “post-stressed” instant continued phonotypes (as in *slush*) represent evaluative name with the implicitly expressed negative connotation and express the idea on the quality of food.
4. Phonointracinesemisms provide us with the rough idea of the ways of eating and its ability to influence the organism (for, example, *blow-out* means a large amount of food followed by the abdominal distention).
5. Different sound-symbolic names of roundness describe products, having the same shape *a bullet* (a doughnut); *honey-blob* (a large and ripe gooseberry); *ball* (a prison ration

of food); *bullets* (peas and beans), etc. (after S.V. Voronin’s classification).

Despite the linguistic belief that the information about features possessed by the metaphor, as a rule, is not available, and metaphoric nomination has a blind inner form, this statement is hardly applied to metaphoric nominations with phonosemantic origins. The motivating imaging of such lexis is easily decoded owing to the ability of the linguistic identity to think in the phonosemantic way, to activate in their consciousness a phonosemantic base accumulated by the linguistic community. The linguistic identity performs as a “dynamic collection of a great experience gained as the result of joined actions both in the reality and communication. Socially motivated reflection helps us to define semantic characteristics of new names by using a number of phonosemantic rules. Evocation of phonosemantic community experience collected on the basis of systemic language phenomenon provides interpretation of the correlation between the current experience and gnoseological image within the process of decoding of the inner form in metaphoric nomination [Bartashova, 2010].

Thus, different associations are actualized through the phonosemantic experience in numerous metaphoric nominations of alcoholic drinks:

1. *stiffener* – something that takes one’s breath;
2. *giggle-water* – something that provokes laughter;
3. *tickler* – something that is “tickling”;
4. *gargle* – a disgusting drink, resembling a liquid for gargarism.

In the meaning of metaphoric nomination the main role is given to a pragmatic component which contains such characteristics as imaging and motivation.

Thus, the metaphoric nomination not so much names as “qualifies” the features of the signified object. This in many ways explains a high degree of motivation in the secondary nomination, since it is motivation that represents such a state of the inner form that is charged with associated and imaged information. The high degree of motivation identifies this correlation of metaphoric meanings, belonging to the conceptual sphere “food” with the meanings of phonosemantic words belonging to different conceptual spheres but relative to the phonosemantic area of the origin (the sphere of primary nomination). The pragmatic component in

the meaning of metaphoric names points at the images containing knowledge about the features of image extension representing something similar to “quasi-denotatum” introduced by the modus of fabulousness. The information about that “quasi-denotatum” is kept in the human consciousness in the amount equal to that in conceptual content of the secondary name. In metaphoric nominations of the conceptual sphere “food” phonosemantic component is preserved to the extent in that it was transferred from the extensional of the source nomination into the implication of the meaning of this metaphoric nomination.

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Метафорический потенциал фоносемантической лексики

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Звукоизобразительная система английского языка (звукоподражательная и звукосемантическая лексика) представляет собой широкую базу для образования вторичных номинаций, что приводит в конечном счете к движению лексической единицы из одной концептуальной области в другую. Процесс метафоризации лексики звукоизобразительного происхождения порождает значительное число номинаций, в которых сохраняются либо прослеживаются определенные корреляции между типом звукоизображения и видом знания, передаваемым этим звукоизобразительным словом при вторичной номинации. Несмотря на бытующее в лингвистике мнение о том, что информация о признаке, передаваемом метафорой, как правило, недоступна, а метафорическая номинация обладает затемненной внутренней формой, это утверждение вряд ли применимо к метафорическим номинациям звукоизобразительного происхождения. Мотивирующая образность подобных лексических единиц, как правило, легко «расшифровывается» в силу наличия у познающего субъекта (языковой личности) так называемой фоносемантической рефлексии, т.е. активизации в сознании индивида звукоизобразительного фонда, накопленного тем или иным языковым коллективом.

Ключевые слова: звукоизобразительность, звукоподражательная лексика, звукосемантическая лексика, фоносемантика, фоностема, фонемотип, фоносемантическая рефлексия, метафоризация.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.
